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Plot to Kill Pope Ordered in Sofia, Italian Papers Say

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ROME, Dec. 8—The imprisoned would-be assassin of Pope John Paul II has given Italian authorities a confession claiming he took his orders from Bulgarian secret service agents, three leading Italian newspapers reported today.

"The plan to kill the pope was conceived in Sofia," said Milan's *Corriere della Sera*, Italy's largest circulation daily, echoing similar reports in two Rome newspapers, the leftist *La Repubblica* and the conservative *Il Tempo*.

All three base their reports on the purported "hundreds of pages" of confession by Mehmet Ali Agca, the right-wing Turkish terrorist who is serving a life sentence for shooting the pope in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981.

None of the newspapers would reveal how they gained access to the purported confession or whether their reporters had actually seen the document. Police officials also refused to comment.

According to *Corriere della Sera*, Agca described his odyssey from a Turkish prison to St. Peter's as run from the start by the Bulgarian secret service. His escape into Bulgaria was managed by Oral Celik, a Turkish terrorist with ties to the Bulgarians, the accounts said.

In Sofia he was aided by another Turk, Bekir Celenk, whom Italian police have linked to arms and drug smuggling, according to the newspapers.

The accounts said Celenk introduced Agca to the three Bulgarians whom authorities have implicated in the plot—Sergei Ivanov Antonov, Rome station chief for Balkan Airlines, Teodorov Ayvazov, a cashier at the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome, and Jelio Kolev Vassiliev, former secretary to Bulgaria's military attache in Rome.

In concert with the three Bulgarians, Celenk was said to have outlined the plan to kill the pope and offered Agca a payoff of 3 million West German marks (about \$1.25 million.)

After several months in Sofia, Agca was sent through Western Europe to lay a false trail, then entered Italy in early May and met in Milan with another Turkish terrorist, Omer Bagci. The accounts say Bagci gave Agca the pistol he used to shoot the pope. Bagci was arrested in Switzerland this summer and extradited to Italy.

In Rome, Agca was given detailed instructions by Ayvazov, whom he identified as the chief conspirator, and Antonov, the accounts of the confession said. Both went with him to St. Peter's Square on May 11 and 12 to pick the spot from which he would shoot, the newspapers reported.

On the day of the shooting, Antonov and Ayvazov picked up Agca in a blue Alfa Romeo which they parked near St. Peter's and all three took positions in the square, the accounts said. The Bulgarians were both armed with pistols and Ayvazov carried a grenade, the newspapers reported.

According to *Corriere della Sera*, Agca had been promised that if he was captured the Bulgarians would arrange his escape, and their failure is what prompted his confession. The newspaper said that Agca was captured with a paper in his pocket bearing the telephone numbers of the Bulgarian Embassy and consulate, the Balkan Airlines office where Antonov worked, and Ayvazov's residence.